

LETTERS OF SUPPORT

for Sam Avery's promotion application to Full Professor

External Reviewer Biographies

Carl Hansen

Carl Hansen is **Vice President of Production for Original Programming at Fox Sports**, where he oversees the development and execution of high-level sports content. In addition to his industry leadership, he serves as co-chair of the ABLE Employee Resource Group, advocating for accessibility and inclusion in media. Hansen is also an accomplished independent filmmaker and disability activist, bringing both creative and institutional perspectives to his work in production and advocacy.

Debra (Debbie) Markowitz

Debra Markowitz is an award-winning filmmaker, screenwriter, and **founder/director of the Long Island International Film Festival (LIIFE)**. She previously served as **Director of the Nassau County Film Office, the Nassau County Film Commission, and the Nassau County Film Advisory Board**, where she also held the role of Executive Director. A longtime leader in independent film, Markowitz is widely recognized for her contributions to regional film infrastructure, education, and advocacy.

Kyle B. Thompson

Kyle B. Thompson is an award-winning filmmaker and the **Director of the Phoenixville Film Festival** in Pennsylvania. His work spans narrative filmmaking and festival leadership, positioning him at the intersection of creative production and exhibition. Through both his films and his curatorial role, Thompson actively supports emerging filmmakers and contributes to the vitality of regional film communities.

Chelsea Gonzalez

Chelsea Gonzalez is an emerging filmmaker and screenwriter selected as **one of eight fellows for the inaugural Blumhouse & K Period Media Horror Screenwriting Fellowship**, presented in partnership with the Sundance Institute. She is currently developing her feature film *Women in Jeopardy* with Blumhouse Productions, a horror-comedy centered on three women trapped inside genre films. Gonzalez's work reflects a distinctive voice in contemporary horror and a rising presence in the industry.

Andrew Fauvelle

Andrew Fauvelle is a **filmmaker and co-founder of Diam Media Group**, a successful commercial video production company based in Syracuse. **A former student of SUNY Cortland's media production program**, Fauvelle has built a thriving career in professional media production, leading a company that delivers high-quality commercial and branded content. His trajectory from student to industry professional reflects both creative achievement and entrepreneurial success.

John J. Fink

John J. Fink is a film critic, educator, and **Artistic Director of the Buffalo International Film Festival**. He is also a **faculty member at Raritan Valley Community College**, where he teaches courses in film studies both on campus and online. Fink is an active participant in the NJ-STEP program, bringing his *Art of Movies* course into New Jersey Department of Corrections facilities. As the founder of *The Film Stage*, he has played a significant role in contemporary film criticism and festival programming.



To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in strong support of Sam Avery's application for promotion to the rank of Full Professor at SUNY Cortland. I offer this perspective as a filmmaker, disability advocate, and collaborator who has worked closely with Sam and the Blackbird Film Festival since 2021.

My involvement with Blackbird began through a shared commitment to expanding access and representation within the film festival space. Since that time, I have had the opportunity to contribute to the festival through Inclusive Filmmaking Workshops and to work alongside Sam in developing programming that is intentionally welcoming to filmmakers and audiences of all abilities. Through this collaboration, I have seen firsthand the level of care, thoughtfulness, and sustained effort that Sam brings to his work.

What distinguishes Sam's leadership of the Blackbird Film Festival is not only the quality of its programming, but the intentionality behind it. Accessibility and inclusion are not treated as secondary considerations, they are built into the structure of the festival itself. This includes creating space for underrepresented voices, supporting filmmakers with diverse needs, and fostering an environment where participants feel genuinely welcomed and valued. These efforts require ongoing attention, adaptability, and a willingness to rethink traditional models of exhibition, all of which Sam approaches with seriousness and integrity.

From my perspective as both a filmmaker and advocate, this work represents a meaningful contribution to the field. Inclusive practices in film exhibition are still evolving, and festivals play a critical role in shaping how accessible and equitable the industry can become. Sam's work with Blackbird reflects a forward-thinking approach that not only supports individual artists, but also contributes to broader conversations about equity and access within the film community. In addition to his work as a curator and festival director, Sam creates opportunities for collaboration that extend beyond the festival itself. The Inclusive Filmmaking Workshops we have developed as part of Blackbird's programming are one example of how his work connects creative practice with education and community engagement. These initiatives demonstrate a sustained commitment to making filmmaking more accessible and to supporting emerging voices in meaningful ways.

Based on my experience working with Sam, I strongly support his promotion to Full Professor. His leadership, creative vision, and dedication to inclusive practices represent a significant and lasting contribution to the field.

Please feel free to contact me if additional information would be helpful.

Sincerely,
F. Carl Hansen
Filmmaker and Disability Advocate



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March 24, 2026

To Whom It May Concern,

It is my distinct pleasure to write in strong support of Sam Avery, whose work as a filmmaker, educator, and festival director represents the very best of what our field has to offer. As someone who has spent decades working in the film industry as a writer, director, producer, and former head of the Nassau County Film Office, as well as a long-time advocate for independent filmmakers, I have had the privilege of engaging with countless artists and leaders. Sam stands out among them.

I have been attending the Blackbird Film Festival in Cortland, New York for several years, and my ongoing involvement with the festival has given me a clear and sustained view of Sam's leadership, vision, and impact. Under his direction, Blackbird has grown into a vibrant, thoughtfully curated, and artist-centered festival that fosters genuine community and meaningful dialogue. It is not simply an exhibition platform but rather a space where filmmakers feel seen, supported, and inspired.

In 2024, I was deeply honored to receive the Black Feather Award at the festival, an experience that further reinforced my respect for Sam's commitment to recognizing and uplifting voices within our industry. The care and intentionality with which he approaches programming, guest engagement, and audience experience are evident at every level.

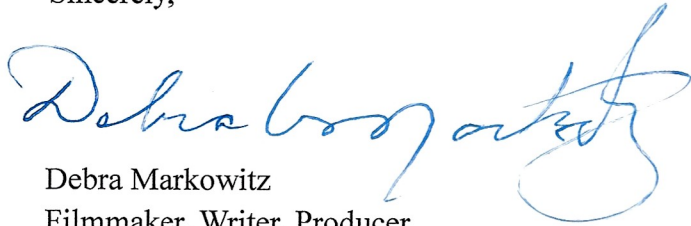
Beyond the festival itself, I have had the opportunity to collaborate with Sam in other professional contexts. I invited him to participate as a featured speaker on a Festival Director Panel at the Long Island International Film Expo (LIIFE), where his insights into independent film exhibition, audience development, and filmmaker support were both thoughtful and impactful. His perspective reflects not only practical experience, but a deep understanding of the evolving landscape of independent cinema.

Additionally, Sam has consistently brought value to Blackbird's "Behind the Scenes" panels, where I and other festival directors have served as panelists over the years. These conversations are a testament to his ability to facilitate meaningful discourse, creating an environment that is both accessible to emerging filmmakers and enriching for seasoned professionals. This is no small feat.

What distinguishes Sam is not only his professional accomplishments, but the integrity and generosity with which he approaches his work. He is a builder of communities, a champion of artists, and a thoughtful educator who understands the responsibility of shaping the next generation of filmmakers. His work bridges the gap between academia and industry in a way that is both rare and deeply needed.

I offer my strongest possible endorsement of Sam Avery. He is a dedicated and impactful leader whose contributions to film and media extend well beyond any single project or role. I have no doubt that he will continue to make meaningful and lasting contributions to our field.

Sincerely,



Debra Markowitz

Filmmaker, Writer, Producer

Co-Founder, Intention Films and Media LLC

Former Director, Nassau County Film Office

Long Island International Film Expo (LIIFE) – Leadership Team



To Whom It May Concern,

I'm writing to strongly support Samuel Avery's application for promotion to Full Professor at SUNY Cortland. I offer this letter as an external reviewer who's gotten to know Sam's work through multiple professional lenses—as a filmmaker, founder of Red Flight Pictures, and Director of the Phoenixville Film Festival in Phoenixville, Pennsylvania.

I've had the chance to engage with Sam's work over several years, both through the Blackbird Film Festival and through our overlapping festival programs and student initiatives. As a filmmaker, I've screened work at Blackbird multiple times since 2020, including during the unique "Sunset Cinema" edition, when Sam managed to run an in-person festival in the middle of the COVID-19 pandemic. Since then, I've attended Blackbird regularly, and I'm always impressed by the quality of the programming, the professionalism of the team, and the clear curatorial vision Sam brings to the festival.

From my perspective as a festival director and programmer, the Blackbird Film Festival is a standout example of thoughtful, carefully executed curation that really contributes to the independent film community. The level of organization, attention to detail, and care for filmmakers speaks to the time and creative effort Sam puts in. His work as Director and Curator isn't just administrative—it's deeply creative, requiring judgment, taste, and ongoing engagement with emerging voices in cinema.

I've also seen Sam's impact as an educator. In 2024, I hosted SUNY Cortland students at the Phoenixville Film Festival, where they took part in a live script reading. Several student-produced films from Sam's ProLab courses, including *Kid Killer* and *Brian's Special Pencil*, also screened at Phoenixville. These experiences showed me how well-prepared and professional his students are, which is a direct reflection of Sam's commitment to giving them meaningful, real-world opportunities in the film world.

What really sets Sam apart is the lasting, community-focused nature of his work. The Blackbird Film Festival has grown into a platform that connects filmmakers, students, and audiences in ways that extend far beyond a single event. Its continued growth and reputation speak to Sam's vision and leadership, making a real, lasting contribution to the field.

Based on everything I've seen, I strongly support Sam's promotion to Full Professor. His work as a filmmaker, curator, and educator shows the kind of sustained excellence and outside-the-classroom impact that this rank is meant to recognize.

Please feel free to reach out if you'd like any additional information.

Sincerely,

Kyle B. Thompson
Founder, Red Flight Pictures
Director, Phoenixville Film Festival



To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in strong support of Sam Avery's application for promotion to the rank of Full Professor at SUNY Cortland. I offer this perspective as a filmmaker, writer, and director who has worked with Sam and the Blackbird Film Festival in a variety of capacities since 2018.

I was first introduced to Blackbird when my film *Suzanne and the Man* screened at the festival, where it received the Powerful Voice Award. From that initial experience, it was clear to me that Blackbird was not only thoughtfully curated, but also deeply invested in elevating meaningful and challenging work. That commitment has remained consistent over the years, both in the films selected and in the conversations the festival creates around them.

Since then, I have continued to engage with Blackbird as both a filmmaker and collaborator. My directorial debut, *All the Wrong Things*, screened at the festival in 2020, and I have since had the opportunity to participate in multiple ways, including serving as a panelist for the Women in Film discussion, joining the festival team as Social Director in 2021, and returning to SUNY Cortland in 2024 to give an Artist Talk on writing for the screen. Through each of these experiences, I have seen firsthand the level of intention and care that Sam brings to both the creative and community-building aspects of the festival.

What stands out most to me is how Sam bridges the gap between filmmaking and education. It is one thing to run a strong festival, but it is another to integrate that work meaningfully into the classroom. I have had the opportunity to speak with his students and to see how he uses my films like *All the Wrong Things* (2020) and *Make the Call* (2022) as teaching tools by encouraging students to engage with complex subject matter while also thinking creatively about tone, genre, and audience. That kind of integration reflects a deep understanding of both the craft and the pedagogy of filmmaking.

From my perspective as a filmmaker working in the industry, spaces like Blackbird are essential. They create opportunities not only for films to be seen, but for artists to connect, share ideas, and grow. Sam has built a festival that supports those goals while also fostering a strong sense of community. His work as a curator and educator is clearly interconnected, and the impact of that work extends well beyond a single screening or event.



Based on my experiences with Sam and the Blackbird Film Festival, I strongly support his promotion to Full Professor. His leadership, creative vision, and commitment to supporting both filmmakers and students represent a meaningful and sustained contribution to the field.

Please feel free to contact me if additional information would be helpful.

Sincerely,

Chelsea Gonzalez

Filmmaker, Director, Writer, Actor



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Syracuse, New York 13202

Andrew Fauvelle
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andy@diammedia.com

To Whom It May Concern,

I'm happy to write in support of Sam Avery's promotion to Full Professor at SUNY Cortland. I had the chance to work with Sam both as a student and later as part of the Blackbird Film Festival, and I can honestly say those experiences played a big role in shaping how I approach my work today.

I was a student in several of Sam's classes at Cortland, including Video Production and New Communication Media, and went on to intern with the Blackbird Film Festival starting in Spring 2020. Even though that semester got thrown off by COVID, I came back later that year to help with the drive-in version of the festival at Greek Peak which, if I remember correctly, was freezing cold but also one of the most memorable production experiences I had as a student.

What stood out to me then (and still does now) is how real everything felt. Blackbird wasn't treated like a typical student event, it operated like an actual production, with real expectations, real pressure, and real responsibility. Sam trusted students to be part of that process, which pushed all of us to step up and take the work seriously.

Since graduating in 2021, I've continued to come back to Blackbird each year as an Assistant Director, helping document the festival and working with current students and interns. That ongoing connection says a lot about the kind of environment Sam has built. It's not just something you do once, it's something people want to stay involved with.

I now work professionally as Co-Founder and Director of Production at Diam Media Group, and I can say that a lot of what I experienced through Sam's classes and Blackbird directly translates to the work I do now. The pace, the collaboration, the need to problem-solve on the fly all feels very familiar.

From my perspective, Sam's impact goes well beyond the classroom. He creates opportunities for students to do meaningful work, and that has a lasting effect. I'm definitely not the only one who has taken that experience and carried it into a career.

I strongly support his promotion to Full Professor and appreciate the opportunity to share my experience.

Sincerely,

Andrew (Andy) Fauvelle
Co-Founder & Director of Production
Diam Media

**BUFFALO
INT'L
FILM
FESTIVAL**



1428 Hertel Avenue
Buffalo New York 14216

buffalofilm.org

SUNY CORTLAND

Attn: Tenure Committee

22 Graham Street

Cortland, NY 13045

24 March 2025

To Whom It May Concern,

I am writing in strong support of Sam Avery's application for promotion to the rank of Full Professor at SUNY Cortland. I have known Sam for over fifteen years, beginning with our time as graduate students at the University at Buffalo, and I have followed his work closely since that time as a fellow filmmaker, curator, educator, and critic.

Over the years, I have had the opportunity to engage with Sam's work across multiple contexts. As Artistic Director and Co-Head of the Buffalo International Film Festival, I have programmed several of his films, including *LocoMotion* and *Not Without Us*, both of which reflect a thoughtful engagement with form, subject matter, and audience. As a filmmaker and critic, I have always found Sam's work to be grounded in a clear creative voice and a commitment to socially engaged storytelling.

Equally significant, however, is Sam's sustained work as Director and Curator of the Blackbird Film Festival. From my perspective as a festival director, I recognize the level of discernment, labor, and long-term vision required to build and maintain a festival of this kind.

Blackbird has developed into a meaningful platform for independent filmmakers, and its continued growth over time speaks to Sam's curatorial sensibility and dedication to fostering a vibrant creative community and putting Cortland and SUNY Cortland on the map for the film industry within and beyond New York State. The festival provides students and the community to interact with traveling filmmakers, developing both a home and a hub for creative voices. The Blackbird Film Festival has been a recipient of several prestigious grants including the National

Endowment for the Arts Grants for Art Projects, cementing the festival's stature as a regional film institution worthy of recognition in a competitive environment.

In addition to his creative and curatorial work, I have also observed Sam's impact as an educator. In 2024, I worked directly with a group of SUNY Cortland students he brought to the Buffalo International Film Festival, where they served as volunteers during the festival. Their professionalism, preparedness, and engagement with the event reflected a strong foundation in both the practical and collaborative aspects of filmmaking and exhibition. This experience reinforced my impression that Sam's teaching is closely aligned with his broader creative practice, connecting students to real-world contexts in meaningful ways. Educators like Sam are vital, blending practical, theoretical and real world industry experience and I have come to know several of Sam's students in the course of my festival travels, seeing them serve in roles at festivals including the Tribeca Festival, DOC NYC, and the Seattle International Film Festival.

What stands out most about Sam's career is the consistency and integration of his work across filmmaking, curation, and education. Rather than existing as separate activities, these elements inform and strengthen one another, resulting in a sustained contribution to the field that is both creative and pedagogical in nature. His work demonstrates an ongoing commitment to supporting independent cinema and to creating opportunities for emerging filmmakers and students alike.

Based on my long-standing familiarity with Sam's work and his continued contributions to the field, I strongly support his promotion to Full Professor. He represents the kind of engaged, thoughtful, and impactful practitioner-scholar that this rank is intended to recognize.

Please feel free to contact me at john@buffalofilm.org or 973-615-3124 additional information would be helpful.

Sincerely,



John J. Fink, MFA

Artistic Director, Buffalo International Film Festival Inc.

Senior Staff Writer, The Film Stage

President, Impact Cinemas LLC

Associate Adjunct Professor, Raritan Valley Community College